

Organizations and People

Teboul has fought lone war to explode myths about Jews

Story and Drawing by
LOU SELIGSON

Victor Teboul, soon after his arrival here 20 years ago, began a lone war to change Quebec's French ideas about who and what the Jews around them were.

He became the leading spearbearer in Montreal to prick and deflate the balloon of venom, hate and falsehood that clouded their reality.

He was articulate, speaking everywhere, writing books, newspapers and magazine articles, creating TV and radio programs in French and English.

Teboul discovered he was moving like an astronaut on strange moon ground, testing lonely territory — because he was probably the first Sephardic Jew challenging the "enemy" directly and immediately on their own turf.

Then, three years ago, he became the Quebec director of the Canada-Israel Committee, an alliance that gave him new strength and scope.

The CIC, the creation of Canada's Jewish communities, was formed in 1971 to inform the public and combat anti-Israel and anti-semitic propaganda.

With head offices in Montreal, and others in Toronto and Ottawa, it operates regionally across the country. Ted Greenfield is Quebec chairman.

Almost as soon as he took office, Teboul created CIC's new magazine, Jonathan, named for the heroic Israeli officer at Entebbe, a slick paper monthly slanted toward French Canadian intellectuals.

Not only is it an avenue for his own journalistic output and interviews with leaders, but Teboul has been able to include contributions from top French and Israeli writers on all phases of Jewish life in Quebec and Canada.

"What is unique," Teboul says, "is that it is the only Jewish magazine for the French — totally in French. And sold only on stands and stores in the larger Canadian centres."

"We created a tool to get across to opinion leaders in Quebec an image of Jews and Israel that corresponds to reality, a link between Jews and non-Jews in French."

Teboul was born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1945. "One day after victory," he laughs. His family was one of 90,000 Jews there who later became targets for expropriation and deportation.

After the British-Israeli 1956 war against Egypt, the roof fell on them. His family was put on a ship to France with no alternatives and they landed there as immigrants.

For seven years Victor lived in Paris, attended a private English school, and looked longingly for a visa to the United States.

"The only country to give us a visa was Canada," he says. "So in 1963 we came to Montreal and with the help of JIAS, we settled in."

He worked at odd jobs for various Zionist organizations while he studied journalism at night and in 1969 took a BA from Sir George Williams University in political science and French.

"There are about 5,000 Egyptian Jews now in Montreal," he says, "and the Sephardic community was not as organized in those days. Even now Egyptians are special. They don't identify themselves with the Sephardic community and this is a problem."

Teboul wrote freelance articles in the French newspapers and magazines, commenting on all aspects of life in Quebec, especially as it pertained to Jews.

"I was searching for a political understanding on my past as well as of Israel," explains.



"But soon I was engulfed in the wider problems we all faced here."

In 1971, a year when he found himself in the middle of everything, it seemed, he wrote Juifs Quebecois on Jewish women and how they are perceived by French Canadian writers. It caused a sensation.

"I tried to correct the stereotype idea they had of Jewish women," he says. "The importance of their social and organizational involvement, flew at the time. And this led me to my book."

Myths and Images of Jews in Quebec came out in 1977 and Teboul attacked the French view of Jews directly and in their own language.

"There was a disturbing image of the Jew in Quebec. It lacked a human dimension. It was only related to money. Similarly with Israel, they saw Jews as exploiters, oppressors. I couldn't let this prevail. I tried to divulge to these intellectuals and writers how they viewed Jews in their work, to confront them directly."

"The Quebecois are not used to anyone from outside their own language to say to them — look here, this is what your best authors are writing. Is it authentic? I was questioning them. The only Jews in their books were merchants, dishonest, exploiters. I showed them otherwise."

Suddenly, the media discovered him as a personality and he found himself not only writing articles, debating and lecturing in French and English, but producing TV and radio program series on the rich mine he had discovered.

"Then the synagogues and Jewish organizations and clubs hit me," he says, "and I was doing the circuit."

Meantime, he took his MA in French studies at McGill and a PhD at the University of Montreal and eventually, one day, he was called to succeed Leon Ben-Baruk as Quebec director of the CIC.

In September, Teboul will publish *The Emergence of Liberalism in Modern Quebec* in French, based on his Doctorate thesis in 1981 — a view he considers optimistically as a more favorable climate for Jews in Quebec in the future.

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